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Syriza in Power (2015-2019): A Review of Selected Aspects


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Abstract:

What are the consequences of Syriza coming to power in Greece in 2015? Did it become a new Weimar Germany for the future Europe? In this article we test the hypothesis that winning two consecutive parliamentary elections in 2015 and forming a government contributed to a farther institutionalisation of this party within the rules of Greek democracy. This article is based on data from the Greek Ministry of Interior and the website of the Greek parliament. This text aims at presenting the process of transformation of Syriza - a radical, left-wing, anti-establishment and anti-austerity party into a governmental entity, pro systemic and accepting the principle of the democratic state of law. All this was due to the establishing of the governmental coalition with ANEL, a nationalist party; social-economic reforms; the reform of the electoral system for parliamentary elections; the proposal of a constitutional reform and the ending of the nearly 30-year dispute with Macedonia. The electoral failure during the parliamentary elections on the 7th of July 2019 finishes a 4-year governance of Syriza and enables us to try to evaluate this experiment for the first time. A key finding of our investigation is the need to highlight the respect for the democratic rules by Syriza during its government and its further institutionalisation as one of the main groupings of the contemporary party system in Greece.

Keywords: Syriza, radical left party, coalition government, Greek democracy, reforms, Prespa Agreement

Introduction

In 2015, in January and September, elections were held to the Greek parliament and in both of them it was the radical left party Syriza, that won. It did not however gain the absolute majority in the Deputy Chamber. In just couple of years it has evolved from a coalition of over a dozen political entities into one group, which gave it eight times stronger electoral support. An important moment for the party's history was the economic crisis of 2008 and the inability of state's elites to govern. For the first time since the collapse of the Regime of Colonels in 1974 and the establishment of the democratic system the ruling parties – the conservatives from New Democracy and the socialists from PASOK, have lost a great deal of their supporters. The Greek party system has become fragmented and was destabilized. It was only after the parliamentary election of 2015 that a leading party has been chosen and it was this party that was to lead Greece out of the difficult economic, social and political situation. The problem was, that it was Syriza, party that till then has been characterized as antiestablishment and anti-government party, known for its politics against the agenda of austerity. Its electoral success came as a shock to the European liberal democracies. It was also a kind of experiment. Syriza's electoral success was on the one hand treated as a chance for more radical changes in the post-democratic reality (e.g. Chantal Mouffe's – left populism; [Mouffe 2018: 14-16](#)), on the other hand Cas Mudde was afraid of a new Weimar in Greece ([Mudde 2017: 7-10](#)).

The article analyzes some aspects of the political agenda of the Syriza's government in the coalition with a smaller right and nationalistic party – Independent Greeks. The time span being studied here is from the Syriza's first electoral win on the 25 January 2015 till the elections held on 7 July 2019, when Syriza becomes a party of opposition.

The basic research problem is the process of evolution of Syriza from an anti-establishment party to party in government; if and how was Syriza able to implement its political agenda, while in power. Was it a threat to democratic institutions? Our first hypothesis is as follows: the time when Syriza was in power (2015-2019) has helped in its institutionalization and led to the abandonment of its most radical political ideas. Second hypotheses: Syriza's less radical political agenda and its functioning within the frames of democratic political system were influenced by external and internal political factors.

Methodology used in the article is based on the comparative method within a single-case study based on the analysis of Syriza's years in government (Caramani 2017: 55-56). Data used come from websites of the Greek Ministry of Interior and the Greek parliament, as well as press.

Authors decided to show chosen aspects of the evolution of the party: 1. Winning both parliamentary elections in 2015 and the government coalition with ANEL; 2. Constitutional reform from 2016; 3. Solving the conflict with Macedonia (the so called Prespa Agreement); 4. Back in opposition – the parliamentary elections from 2019.

The double parliamentary elections of 2015. The coalition government with ANEL

Syriza was created before the parliamentary election of 2004 as a coalition of over a dozen different entities – leftist, ecological, communist and other independent activist groupings fighting for the minority rights. The basis for its formation was Synaspismós – Coalition of Leftist and Ecological Movements (Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς των Κινήσεων και της Οικολογίας, Συνασπισμός or ΣΥΝ) which was established in 1992. Alexis Tsipras was its member. In 2009 he replaced Alekos Alavanos as a leader of the coalition. At the beginning of its functioning Syriza stressed its unity and radicalism as well as its unwillingness to cooperate with socialists and reformists. In 2004 Syriza had 6 deputies in the House, gaining 3.3% (all chosen deputies came from Synaspismós). Next important step in Syriza's functioning was its evolution from a loose coalition into a political party during a congress held on 10-14 July 2013. Aleksis Tsipras was chosen again to be the party's secretary in pre-elections, linking different ideological movements (anti-capitalist, trockist and movements connected with communist, socialist or feminist ideology).

An important impact on the Greek political scene had the economic crisis of 2008 which led to the political destabilization. Difficult domestic situation was believed to be caused by the corrupt two-party system and one-party governments led by either center-right New Democracy or center-left party PASOK (All Greek Socialist Movement). There was hope for change with the possible win of PASOK in the parliamentary election from 4 October 2009. Unfortunately, the worsening of economic situation of the country made the government sign the so called First Memorandum – a document guaranteeing Greece help from its international partners. With lots of accompanying protests and manifestations the socialists established an act accepting the international help (ΦΕΚ 2010). Gradually, as in Spain, more and more groups refusing to accept

the austerity agenda started to crop up. Among them were Direct Democracy Now – Indignant Citizens Movement and Constitution Square Movement (Skai 2011).

Greece was unable to cope with the economic crisis and further international help was required which led to the acceptance of two more memorandums in 2012 and 2015 – Memorandum II and III. Financial support was available on the provisional basis - Greece had to agree to implement economic reforms. The control of the implementation was granted to International Monetary Fund, European Commission and Central European Bank. A referendum called by the coalition government that was held on 5 July 2015 has showed that citizens wanted the government to decline the offer of next financial agreement that would impose more budget cuts. There was a threat of Grexit – Greece leaving the euro zone. It did not mean however that the credit negotiations were easier. Eventually, the terms agreed upon in the III Memorandum were approved by the Greek parliament in August 2015, the money were transferred by European institutions in August 2018.

The consequences of economic crisis, especially the austerity agenda, privatization and structural reforms contributed to a quick degradation process and impoverishment of the society leading to the radicalization of the public opinion and the creation of the new socio- political cleavage: for/against the Memorandum (which supplanted the classical left-right cleavage) on the basis of which radical groups like Syriza or neonazist Golden Dawn gained importance and traditional parties deteriorated. The aforementioned parties, being against the Memorandum, were created before the economic crisis, but they were not relevant parties then.

The lack of political stability and waves of protests led to earlier elections on 6 May, then on 17 May 2012. Two elections were the result of the fragmentation of the party system. The vitality index had the highest levels in Greek history – 48.7 (May 2012), what means that every second voter changed their preferences. There were 7 parties in the Parliament. Both elections were won by New Democracy, support for it amounted to 18.85% in May and 29.66% in June (which was the result of fears of Syriza winning). Golden Dawn, a neofacist party got into the parliament for the first time, with the support of 7% of voters. It was created by Nikolaos Michaloliakos in 1983 and it connects itself with NSDAP (it uses a symbol similar to swastika). Its main goal is to get rid of immigrants.

Table 1. Results of the Greek parliamentary elections in the years 2007-2015

Party name	2007		2009		2012 (I)		2012 (II)		2015 (I)		2015 (II)	
	V	S	V	S	V	S	V	S	V	S	V	S
SYRIZA	5.04	14	4.59	13	16.79	52	26.89	71	36.34	149	35.46	145
ND	41.84	152	33.49	91	18.85	108	29.66	129	27.81	76	28.10	75
PASOK	38.10	102	43.94	160	13.18	41	12.28	33	4.68	13	6.28	17
KKE	8.15	22	7.53	21	8.48	26	4.50	12	5.47	15	5.55	15
LAOS	3.80	10	5.62	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Golden Dawn	-	-	-	-	6.97	21	6.92	18	6.28	17	6.99	18
Independent Greeks (ANEL)	-	-	-	-	10.62	33	7.51	20	4.75	13	3.69	10
Democratic Left (DIMAR)*	-	-	-	-	6.11	19	6.25	17	-	-	-	-
The River (To Potami)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.05	17	4.09	11
Union of Centrists	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.43	9

V – percentage of votes; S – number of seats in the 300-seat House of Deputies

*DIMAR in a coalition with PASOK in the elections of 20 September 2015

Source: The Hellenic Parliament. <http://www.parliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Ekloges/Eklogika-apotelesmata-New/> (15/11/2015).

After the elections on 17 June 2012 Syriza became the second political Power in Greece, with the support of 26% of voters, losing with New Democracy by just 3%. With the society being dissatisfied with the politics of austerity of parties in power after 1974, Syriza could start preparing to taking the reins of the state. The first phase of preparations was changing the internal structure, it moped from being a coalition to being a political party (July 2013). Its members chose their new leader - Alex Tsipras. Second phase was the preparation of a political programme, which was announced in August 2014 as “The Thessaloniki Programme” – the National Reconstruction Plan . Its main tenets were based on 4 themes: 1) Confronting the humanitarian crisis; 2) Restarting the economy and promoting tax justice; 3) Regaining employment; 4) Transforming the political system to deepen democracy (SYRIZA 2014; Ratajczak 2018: 244-245).

Inability to choose a president of Republic led to earlier election held on 25 January 2015. Syriza won the election gaining 36.34 % of votes and 149 seats. The result did not let it create the government on its own, as a majority of 151 seats is needed, so National Patriotic Alliance – ANEL- a populist nationalist right party became its natural coalition partner. National Patriotic Alliance was created by Panos Kammenos in 2012 by former New Democracy activists. In the

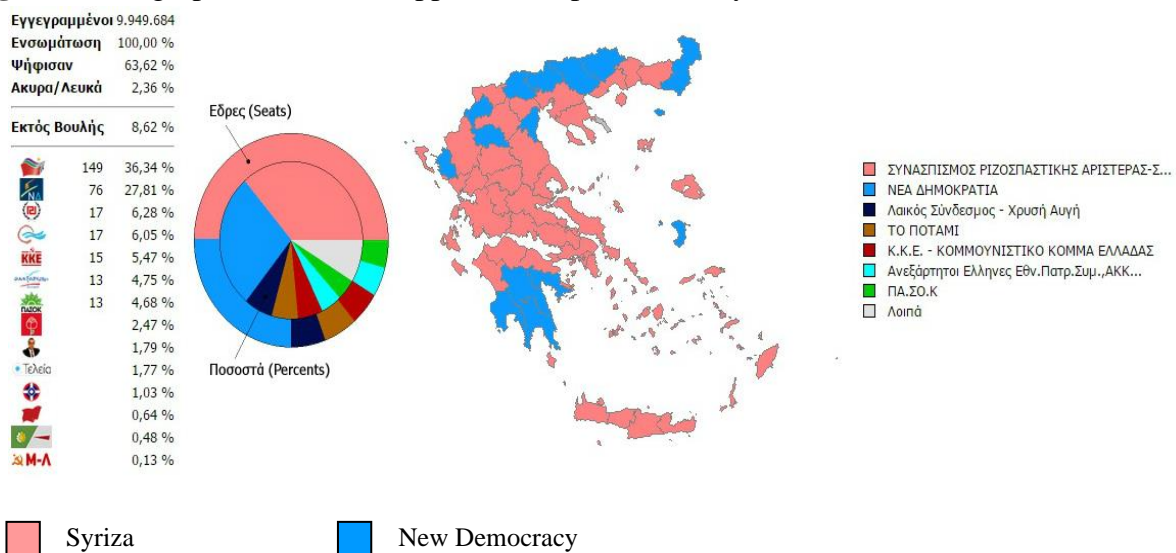
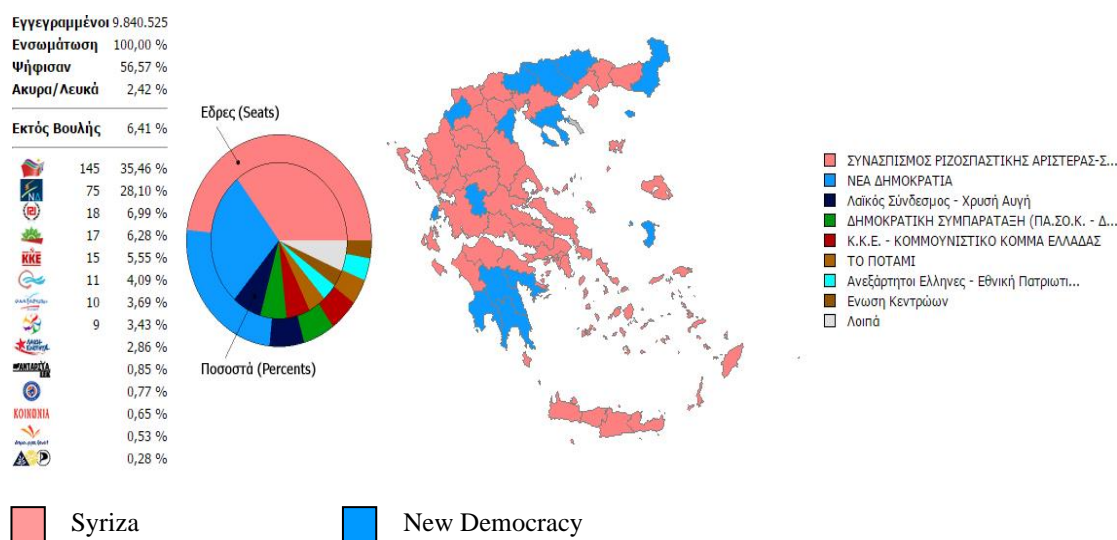


Figure 2. Geographical areas of support in the parliamentary elections of 20 September 2015

Source: Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs. <http://ekloges.yypes.gr/current/v/public/index.html#%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:{}> (15/11/2015).

On 20 September 2015 the election was held and Syriza got 35.46% of the votes (145 seats) and ANEL 3.69% (10 seats), creating second government with Tsipras as its leader. The financial help Niven to Greece Since 2018 meant structural reforms and further politics of austerity. The crucial changes included: the improving of the VAT system, extending the tax base, program of cuts in budget expenditure, privatisation and modernisation of public sector, reform of justice system, energy sector reform, bank governance and the establishment of the revenue agency, reduction of pensions and reform of the pension system, abolition of many social benefits, tax increases and other economic changes (Ratajczak 2018: 248-250).

Syriza's reform plans included a gradual enlargement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights in Greece. In the years 2015-2019 new laws were passed concerning: legality of same-sex sexual activity, recognition of same-sex relationships, child adoption and foster care, discrimination and hate speech, gender identity and expression, sex education in schools.

One of the most important changes proposed by the government of Syriza-ANEL was the electoral reform and the project of revision of the Constitution. 21 July 2016 a new electoral law was established what meant the end of the majority bonus - 50 seats for the winning party. Also the age limit for voters was lowered – voters have to be 17 years old. The 3% threshold was upheld (ΦΕΚ 2016). In accordance with art. 54 of the Constitution from 1975, the change of the

electoral system cannot be implemented immediately, the new law is valid in next elections, as it was not approved by the 2/3 majority (179 votes were in favor of the changes: Syriza, ANEL, Union of Centrists).

The Constitutional reform

Before analyzing the constitutional revision project presented by the Tsipras Government in 2016 it is crucial to focus on the influence exerted by a certain narrative of the Greek political situation and the constitutional framework.

The Constitution of 1975 has been the basic instrument for the transition to democracy after the fall of the colonel's dictatorship. A first limited constitutional revision was passed in 1986 and affected only eleven articles of the text. It was proposed by the PASOK government and passed accordingly with the amending formula set by art. 110. Its intention was basically aimed at the strengthening of the Prime Minister's role within the institutional framework. A broad political consensus among the two major parties supported the second revision in the constitutional history of Greece in 2001. It was for the New democracy the turn to promote changes to a wide-range of articles of the existing constitutional text. Over 48 articles were subject to constitutional revision and four new articles were added making the Greek constitution one of the most detailed ones in the western world. A new and extensive revision of the Constitution was initiated in 2004 by the New Democracy led government. The revision process ended in 2008. Despite the wide amendment proposal, not supported by the opposition party PASOK, only limited changes were adopted, the most important of which affected the parliamentary incompatibility with the exercise of any other professional activity. As it has been shown, past constitutional revisions proved insufficient to provide effective answers to the shortcomings of the constitutional culture and Greek politics, neglecting to strengthen the rule of law.

But in which way are constitutions able to promote the Rule of Law? This is a crucial and longstanding question to which scholars have sought an answer. To this respect the analysis of the recent constitutional amendment attempts in Greece may be emblematic, as the proposal issued by the Tsipras government seeks to reaffirm the rule of law, but essentially fails its goal. Since the outbreak of the crisis discussions about constitutional reform have been continued, although the initiation of a formal amendment process was blocked until 2013, due to the time-

constraints imposed by the constitutional amending formula¹. The severe institutional malfunctions detected in Greece, such as the increase of fast-track legislation, the abdication of the legislature to the advantage of the Executive, the rise of the far-right and of the far-left populist parties may not be solely considered as distinctive features qualifying the Greek case.

All throughout the crisis calls for radical constitutional change became frequent, reaching the point of entertaining the idea of a complete re-draft of the Constitution. Nevertheless, Greek political elite seemed to ignore the severe problems faced by the society where strong political polarization, populism and corruption wounded and left significant scars over the country's political culture very hard to heal (Aravantinou Leonidi et al. 2017; Aravantinou Leonidi 2015).

It is indeed certain that the crisis triggered the debate over constitutional revision, as many political actors discovered themselves being convinced that it was the Constitution that was to blame for the crisis and its devastating social costs. This is clearly one way to put it and it is somehow misleading. The other is that the Greek constitution proved highly adaptable to changes, while it was the political system that collapsed, because of endemic corruption, populism and nepotism. In the end, probably both approaches can be equally accepted. The crisis unearthed the great demand for change coming from the Greek society characterized more and more by a profound loss of confidence in parliamentary institutions. How this wave of dissatisfaction has been interpreted by the political actors as a mandate to initiate a radical revision of the fundamental charter of the country, where other more urgent legislative actions could have been taken without a formal amendment process is a question probably to be left unanswered². The recent parliamentary adoption of the new electoral law has convinced the Prime Minister (ΦΕΚ 2016), Alexis Tsipras, that the time for the constitutionalization of the proportional system is ripe and that the decision can no longer be delayed (Antoniou 2016a).

The core issues around which the political and academic debate developed in Greece are essentially: the institution of a Constitutional Court (Mavrias 2013, 2005; Vegleris 1967, 1979; Ierapetritis 2005: 443), the provision of direct election for the President of the Republic, the strengthening of the role of the Parliament, the strengthening of direct democracy through the introduction of the referendum as a key political instrument and finally the constitutionalization of the electoral system. The latter proposal has been considered as a strong element of rupture

¹ The requirement that a new revision process cannot be initiated within five years from the previous represents a characteristic feature of the Greek amending formula and a serious obstacle to constitutional innovation.

² Several scholars have recently called for changes that are indeed of a constitutional character but concern the substantial and not the formal Constitution.

with respect to the intentions of the Greek constituents who considered more appropriate to vest the power to establish the electoral system in ordinary laws rather than in the Constitution. The parliamentary form of government is, therefore, an unchangeable organizing principle of the constitutional system, as well as the multi-party system and the rule of law. The amending power is vested exclusively in the unicameral Parliament and no other constitutional body can interfere.

As it has been said the amending procedure is quite complex and it is structured into two stages. The need for a revision of the Constitution shall be established by a decision taken by the Parliament, upon the proposal of at least fifty deputies and by a majority of three-fifths of the total number of Assembly members, in two votes by roll-call held at least one month apart. The provisions that are to be revised are specifically defined by this resolution. It will then be up to the next Parliament, the so-called *Revisional Parliament* to proceed to the amendment of the constitutional provisions within its first term. It is worth noting that art.110 provides for a system of reversed majorities and the adoption of the revision proposal by the first and the second Parliament. The Constitution of 1975 introduced this system to guarantee a certain equality among the first Parliament and the Revision Parliament. In case a proposal receives the absolute majority of the members of the “Bouli ton Ellinon” (*Βουλή των Ελλήνων*) in the first Parliament, but not the supermajority of the three-fifths, the Revisional Parliament proceeds to the amendment of the constitutional provisions with a majority of three-fifths of its members and vice versa. Each revision of the Constitution that has been passed is published in the Official Journal no later than ten days following the vote of the Assembly and comes into force with a special resolution of the Chamber. The amending formula sets a mandatory time lapse between revisions, that is, revision of the Constitution is not permitted within five years of the completion of the previous one³.

The Tsipras Constitutional amendment proposal in detail

In 2016, few days after the parliamentary vote on the new electoral law, on July 25, the Greek Prime Minister announced his proposals for a revision of the Constitution of Greece ([Antoniou 2016b](#)). Making continuous reference to what he defined as “the new transition”, Alexis Tsipras, presented the SYRIZA-ANEL constitutional amendment proposal structured in

³ The time-constraints set by the Constitution have been recently challenged by Greek constitutional law scholars paving the way to a new interpretative approach according to which the five-year constraint should be referred to the time before a constitutional amendment procedure is concluded and not to the pause between one revision and the other. This latest approach has gained some support especially in the aftermath of recent necessity ([Metaxas 2016](#)).

five “axes”: regime architecture, reinforcement of direct democracy, reinforcement of the rule of law, State-Church relations, social rights.

As for the changes affecting the form of government, the proposal entails the constitutionalization of proportional representation; the establishment of the constructive vote of no-confidence on the model of Art.67 of the German Basic Law (*Mißtrauenim Bundestag*) ; the direct election of the President of the Republic - the President would be elected by the Parliament if a qualified majority of two-thirds in two consecutive votes were reached (Tsiliotis 2019; Pararas & Blaxopoulos 2019). If these votes prove fruitless, then the people would directly elect one of the first two candidates that emerged from the parliamentary vote; the enhancement of the competences of the President of the Republic; fixed tenure for members of parliament suggesting that no member of parliament can be elected for more than two consecutive parliamentary periods or eight consecutive years; the express provision that to be appointed as Prime Minister - with the exception of caretaking ones - one would have to be a member of the parliament. The strengthening of direct democracy is, in fact, the second point entrenched in the proposal of the Greek government, which intended to make mandatory consultative referendums for the transfer of state functions. A major innovation is the introduction of referendums by popular initiative. A referendum on a “national issue” could be initiated by 500,000 citizens; while one million signatures would be sufficient to call for a referendum to reject a bill approved by the Chamber - with the exception of budgetary bills⁴.

The third axis of the proposal aimed to strengthen the rule of law through the establishment of a Supreme Court composed solely of judges entitled to rule on the constitutionality of a law following a proposal of the President of the Republic or 120 deputies. It also provided for the abolition of parliamentary immunities and a radical overhaul of the provisions relating to the responsibility of ministers.

Regarding the relations between the Greek State and the Orthodox Church (art. 3 Cost.), the government's proposal provides for the formalization of state secularism reserving, however, for historical and practical reasons, to the orthodoxy the status of dominant religion. The text also provides for the abolition of the obligation for state officers, judges and other public officials to take an oath in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities of the Greek Orthodox Church (Art. 59

⁴ Currently, referendums on crucial national issues may only be held following a decision of the absolute majority of parliament (art.44 par.2). Prior to the 5 July 2015 bailout referendum no referendum had been held in Greece since the 1975 Constitution was enacted. For a focus on the role of the people in constitutional amending processes see [Contiades & Fotiadou 2016](#).

par. 1, Art. 33 par. 2). The Greek Government's proposal made also some special provisions concerning social rights, expressly prohibiting lifting public management of water and energy, banning any privatization in these sectors, safeguarding collective negotiations as the only means for the definition of wages, and introducing arbitration as a mandatory means for the resolution of relevant labor disputes⁵. Since its introduction, the 2016 revision proposal has triggered a debate among constitutional law scholars and politicians ([Pikramenos 2017](#)). It achieved its peak in 2018 during a parliamentary debate in which the impossibility to reach any political deal between the Syriza-led government and the other political forces on the major axes of the reform emerged vividly.

What's next? After the July 2019 election

The revision process started by the Tsipras government in 2016 is now at a dead point and maybe has turned out being a trap rather than an opportunity to make that change the former Prime Minister of Greece called for ([Alivizatos 2018](#)). Things have radically changed after the July 2019 general election. After a decade of turmoil the newly-elected government led by the conservative party of Nea Dimokratia, which won the elections with a significant majority, is promising to put Greece back on the tracks of economic recovery and political stability. But there are serious concerns stemming from the endemic deficiencies of the political system and the unclear ties between Nea Dimokratia and populist nationalism. Ten years ago, along with the debt crisis, came the anger against the political establishment and the rising xenophobia. These brought to the forefront new political forces, which, before the crisis were in the margins: Syriza in the far left of social democracy, and Golden Dawn in the far right of the far right. Although Golden Dawn has not managed to be re-elected to parliament in these recent elections, though still sitting in the European Parliament, another far-right party has made its way in the political arena: it is called *Elliniki Lysi* (Greek solution) and its ideological discourse is closer than it may seem to that of Golden Dawn. Greece's new conservative Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, is the big winner of the last elections. He promises to set a new tone after four-and-a-half years of often rollercoaster rule under his leftwing predecessor Alexis Tsipras, but it is left to be seen if he

⁵ The academic community has been very active in the debate over the constitutional reform. The exchanges among constitutional law professors have been hosted by the legal review *Επίκαιρα Θέματα Συνταγματικού Δικαίου* (Current Topics of Constitutional Law), European Center of Constitutional Law, Themistocles Tsatsos Foundation. The debate over the reform has crossed academic borders and reached the wider public, also thanks to the initiative promoted by a leading Greek newspapers. Among the many scholars who have spoken out on the pages of the newspaper see [Ierapetritis 2016](#).

will be able to impose his values over the strong far-right tendencies running in his party and which may affect severely also the newly announced constitutional revision proposal. One of the most important points stressed by Mitsotakis during the election campaign was to stop the “catastrophic constitutional revision” set forth by the Syriza Government and change the electoral law (Pinakidis 2019). The time is ripe to make further remarks on the new Government’s intentions, but what is certain is that the 2016 constitutional revision proposal is not there to stay.

The Prespa Agreement

The long-standing bitter name dispute between Greece and Skopje (Kofos 1986; 2005; Koukoudakis 2018; Marinov 2013) was settled by the Prespa Agreement at Lake Prespa on 17 June 2018 (Rohdewald 2018), and its subsequent ratification by the Macedonian and Greek parliaments in late 2018 and early 2019, and the official renaming of Macedonia to North Macedonia in February 2019.

The name dispute was reignited after the break-up of Yugoslavia and dominated the discourse ever since bilateral and international relations. A northern province of Greece is also called Macedonia (as, famously, was the country of Alexander the Great) and Greece saw in the name Macedonia a territorial and cultural claim on Greek land. Greece insisted on Macedonia being called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in international organizations.

With this Act, in exchange for changing the name of the State, the Head of the Macedonian Government Zoran Zaev obtained from his Greek counterpart, Alexis Tsipras, a promise of the removal of the veto for joining NATO and the European Union (Armakolasa & Triantafyllou 2017). To make the agreements effective, the two Governments both had to overcome the nationalist forces within their respective states and then comply with certain obligations. Indeed, 2019 opened with the parliamentary debate on the Macedonian constitutional reform required by the agreements and necessary for their implementation, which will be examined in detail in the sections dedicated to the institutions of Northern Macedonia. After a difficult negotiation with some deputies expelled by the opposition party VMRO-DPMNIE and with the leaders of the two parties of the Albanian minority, the government managed to secure the support necessary to obtain the parliamentary approval of the four constitutional amendments presented. The Government succeeded only in extremis to find an agreement with the two Albanian parties, pledging to support their requests through the approval of further subsequent

rules. In this way, on 11 January, the constitutional reform was approved by a qualified majority of 81 representatives. The voting also took place in this case in the absence of the deputies of VMRO-DPMNIE. Consequently, from 12 February the new name of the State has officially become Northern Macedonia. The name issue was also the subject of the presidential election campaign. In fact, of the three candidates who presented themselves in the first round on 21 April, namely Stevo Pendarovski, (SDU), Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova (VMRO-DPMNIE), and the Albanian independent Blerim Reka the first two particularly clashed right around this point.

In Greece the Prespa Agreement, which recognizes the name of “North Macedonia”, led to a strong popular backlash, with riots breaking out in Athens and Thessaloniki, and to a political fallout which was expensively paid by the Tsipras’ Government at the general election of July 2019 (Klapisis 2018; Mavrozacharakis 2019). In January the parliamentary vote on the Agreement severely threatened the Greek government led by Alexis Tsipras obliged to seek the Parliament’s confidence vote, following the resignation, notified on 13 January, of Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, head of the ANEL party (Independent Greeks), junior partner in the Greek government. Kammenos, leader of a nationalist and right-wing party, albeit in coalition since 2015 with Tsipras, left the ministerial position due to profound differences relating to the historic controversy with Skopje.

In his speech to the House, prior to the confidence vote, Prime Minister Tsipras referred to two crucial constitutional issues, on which further discussion is worth.

The first question is whether or not the Government was obliged to seek the confidence of Parliament after the dissolution of the government coalition (Tsiliotis 2018). The Prime Minister expressed the view, which is probably the prevailing one in scholarship, that in this particular case there was a potential submission of confidence by the Government under Article 84 (1) of the Constitution. In this view, as long as there is no change in the face of the Prime Minister, the issue of confidence is left to the political discretion of the Government. However, especially in the event of the collapse of a coalition government and since there is no longer an undisputed absolute parliamentary majority supporting the Government, the opinion that the Government is constitutionally bound to raise a question of confidence is also strongly supported. In fact, from the point of view of constitutional ethics, such an obligation exists even when the Government still holds the absolute parliamentary majority, as happened after the withdrawal of DIMAR in 2013 from the three-party ND-PASOK-DIMAR coalition government. It is important, however, that the Prime Minister implicitly accepted, that the political legitimacy of the Government in the

process of casting a vote of confidence requires an absolute majority of 151 members. This tends to create a strong political "precedent" that makes it difficult for minority governments to form in Greece. The paradox is, of course, that the current Greek constitution, because of its persistence in pursuing the goal of governmental stability, not only allows but also shields minority governments, as a majority vote of 120 is sufficient to obtain a confidence vote. The second issue concerns the free mandate of the Members of Parliament, which was warmly endorsed by the Prime Minister in the House, in a way that leads to almost complete supremacy of the representative system (Rule 51 (2) ed: "Members represent the Nation") above to the system of political parties (Article 29 (1) of the Constitution), on which the functioning of the democratic principle under the current Constitution is based. There is no doubt that under Article 51 par. 2 the MP is free to vote in accordance with and against the directions of his/her party, without being subject to any legal sanction (eg. loss of parliamentary office). This is given and cannot be changed even by a revision of the Constitution, because Article 51 (2) of the Constitution of 1975 belongs to the provisions that determine the basis of the current parliamentary regime. The Greek premier, Alexis Tsipras, successfully passed the vote of confidence that he had asked to Parliament. According to the official count, 151 parliamentarians voted in favor of the Tsipras government, including several independents. Support for the government was also assured by some deputies recently expelled by ANEL for having announced their vote in favor of the government and the ratification of the Prespa agreement over the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

According to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Policy ([MFA 2019](#)) the Prespa Agreement ratified by the Greek Parliament on 1 February 2019 will bring some advantageous consequences for Greece:

- 1) The neighboring country is named Northern Macedonia and the permanent international recognition of FYROM with its constitutional name (over 130 countries) ends. From now on, not only will the name of the country cease to be "Macedonia", but they cannot be called "Macedonian", without the designation "North" of all state institutions, public buildings or even private entities, provided they are funded by the state or have been established by law (Article 1 (3) (g))
- 2) The European perspective and stability in the neighboring country are strengthened, thereby reducing the risk of third-party designs being influenced by alienated designs on Greece's northern border.

- 3) Not only does significant diplomatic capital safeguard Greece's other, growing, challenges, but it also strengthens its role in the region as a European pillar of peace and security and weakens the aggressive nationalism of other forces.
- 4) The role of Macedonia and Thrace in the regional economic hub is being upgraded. Greece and FYROM, pending nomenclature, have a contractual framework of bilateral relations that is completely inadequate, the contractual framework of Greece's relations with then Yugoslavia. There are no key agreements, such as the Investment Protection and Double Taxation Agreement and all other modern economic and road and rail financial agreements, which implies this lack of investment in our neighbor, our exports, our road, rail and energy interconnection, for the port of Thessaloniki and its natural economic hinterland.
- 5) For the first time the neighboring country recognizes that it has nothing to do with Macedonia's "ancient Greek culture, history, culture and heritage" (Article 7 (3), (4)). In addition, it commits itself (Article 8 (2), (3)) to the deconstruction of the notorious program of witchcraft (anything "referring in any way to ancient Greek history and culture that forms an integral component of Greece's historical or cultural heritage" in infrastructure / buildings / monuments) and for the removal of the Vergina Sun from all public spaces and withdrawal from any public use. This process has even begun, with the renaming of the neighboring Airport already under way, as well as the National Road to Skopje. It should be noted that, of course, there has never been a question of restricting the use of the term Macedonia in relation to Greece, which maintains it in its entirety (eg Macedonia Airport).
- 6) FYROM modifies the aggressive designations of all its state bodies and public institutions / bodies / organizations, as well as those of private institutions / bodies / organizations that are state-sponsored or constituted by law in order to respond to the compound name ('the North' Macedonia "and no longer" Macedonian ").
- 7) The neighboring country is bound by the Agreement (Articles 4, 6) and amending its Constitution (Articles 3 and 49) to eliminate any form of revisionism and alienation (by public or private actors), respecting sovereignty, territorial integrity and Greece's political independence and the principle of non-interference in Greece's internal affairs.
- 8) It is also envisaged to set up a Joint Interdisciplinary Committee of Experts on Historical, Archaeological and Educational Issues, which will examine, among other

things, school textbooks in order to eliminate, as specifically defined, alienated references (eg "Greater Macedonia" maps).

- 9) Any possibility of claiming "rights" for a so-called minority in Greece is eliminated. The neighboring country pledges that "nothing in its constitution as it is in force today or will be amended in the future" will be able to serve as a basis for intervention in Greece's internal affairs "including the protection of the status and rights of any person who is not its citizen" (Article 4 (3). Its constitution is amended in a way that only citizens and its Diaspora can be supported (and not "to the Macedonian people in the neighboring countries", as reported to date).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Prespa Agreement does not mention or regulate ethnicity issues. In addition, the amendment to the FYROM (now North Macedonia) Constitution states that "citizenship does not determine or predetermine the nationality to which the citizens of the country belong." This is explicitly and bindingly referring to FYROM (now North Macedonia) and to the verbal consignment sent from Skopje. The Agreement, therefore, does not recognize a "Macedonian people" or a "Macedonian nation". The Agreement, moreover, does not deny the right of Greek citizens to call the citizens of their neighboring country the conditions they use today (Article 7).

Some constitutional law scholars ([Pararas 2018](#)) highly criticized the Agreement, stressing some controverted legal issues, but the Prespa Agreement is generally acknowledged as an international victory of the Tsipras Government ([Tsiliotis 2019](#)).

Parliamentary elections held on 7 July 2019. Syriza loses

The reforms undertaken by Syriza's government, especially the socio-economic ones, were deemed as not reaching far enough. They were not what the party promised in the 2015 election campaign. The growing disappointment in the society reached its climax with the discussions on the Macedonian issue and the resolution of the problem by an international treaty. Research conducted by one of the top Greek public opinion research institutes - Public Issue in November 2018 has shown, that 60% of Greeks were against the name for the state – Northern Macedonia, and only 28% had a positive attitude towards it (13% definitely positive attitude) ([Public Issue Report 2018](#)). There was also a dispute in the coalition government which led to its dissolution.

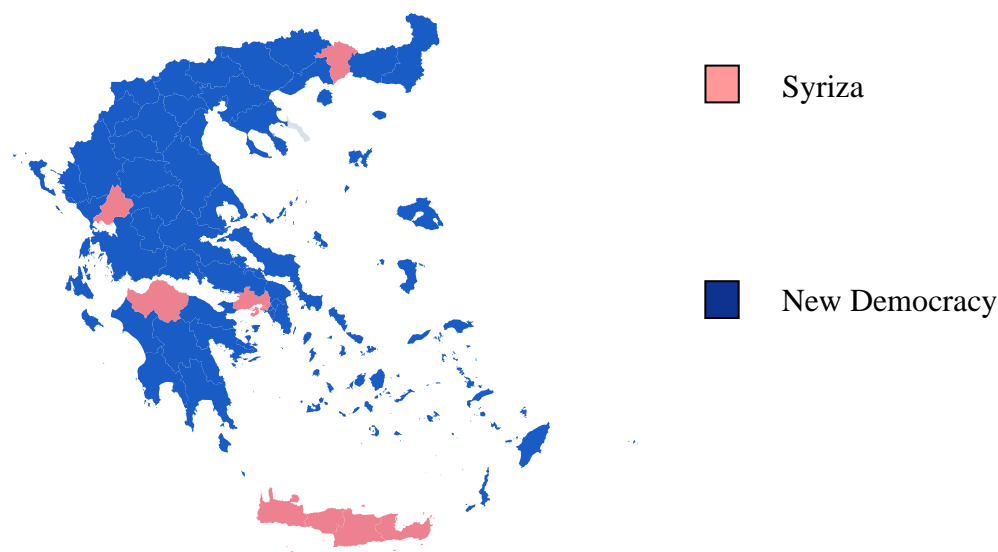
The next test for Syriza were the consecutive election to the European Parliament and local and regional elections held on 26 May 2019. It managed to sustain its 6 mandates, but with the support of only 23% of citizens while New Democracy gained a support of 33%. Even bigger success awaited for the opposition in the local elections (26 May and 2 June), as it won in 12 out of 13 regions and two biggest cities - Athens and Thessaloniki. Kostas Bakoyiannis, the nephew of the leader of New Democracy, became the mayor of Athens (his mother was chosen as the first women-mayor of Athens in the years 2003-2004). After the failure of European Parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Tsipras decided to call for an early elections to the Greek parliament, which were held on the 7 July 2019.

Table 2. Parliamentary elections of 7 July 2019

Political Party	Leader	Seats	Votes (%)	Vote number
New Democracy	Kyriakos Mitsotakis	158	39.85	2,251,426
Syriza	Alexis Tsipras	86	31.53	1,781,180
Movement for Change	Fofi Gennimata	22	8.10	457,527
Communist Party of Greece	Dimistris Koutsoumpas	15	5.30	299,595
Greek Solution	Kyriakos Velopoulos	10	3.70	208,806
MeRA25	Yianis Varoufakis	9	3.44	194,233

Source: The Hellenic Parliament. <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Ekloges/Eklogika-apotelesmata-New/#IH> (10/09/2019).

Figure 3. Geographical areas of support in the parliamentary elections of 7 July 2019



Source: Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs, <https://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/home/> (10/09/2019).

New Democracy with Kyriakos Mitsotakis won also the parliamentary elections, getting an absolute majority in the unicameral parliament and creating a one-party government. Syriza gained 31.53% of the votes, losing to the last election by 3.93% which amounted to the loss of 59 out of the 145 seats it held earlier. Such a big difference in the share of seats between two main parties is caused by the use, for the last time, the majority bonus which means that the winner gets 50 seats. The result Syriza got in the last elections has to be viewed positively, especially taking into consideration problems it had to cope with like economic or migration crisis and conducting reforms while having no stable majority in the parliament and coalition government.

Conclusion

The elections held in 2015 were no doubt a success for Syriza, which became the main political party in Greece. In 2009 in the parliamentary elections it had gained 4.59% of votes, in the September of 2015 it was already 35.46% . Such a substantial rise in the support could be not possible if it were not for the economic crisis in 2008 and its consequences.

The difficult social and economic situation, the dependence of Greece on the foreign financial support and the need to create a coalition government had a big impact on the intra-party dynamics, as well as on the political decisions made in government and in parliament. Syriza started to govern in the face of the threat of Grexit, the bankruptcy of the state and the radicalization of the public opinion and political destabilization. When it was finishing its term it was with the resolution of the Macedonian dispute, even if the treaty did not gain the popular support. In the economic sphere, the continuation of the austerity agenda was met with a public disappointment. Also issues connected to the resolution of the migration crisis and the creation of the migration camps in Greece were difficult. The change of the electoral system in the parliamentary elections and the New Project of the constitution were only a partial realization of Syriza's plans, as they were not carried out to their fullest, they did not lead to the so called Μεταπολίτευση (the change of the political system), which was "to lead New Greece since 2021" (Antoniou 2016c).

Notwithstanding the difficult domestic and foreign determinants, the four years of Syriza's government together with the nationalistic party ANEL were directed at a compromise that was to help solve the difficult social economic and political situation. Becoming part of the

government meant the abandoning of more radical reforms but did not mean the abandonment of plans for the change of the political system.

Both hypotheses have to be positively verified. Syriza's time in government was for it a test of party's unity. Till 2013 it was made up of a coalition of over a dozen different political formations. With the taking of a less radical political stance, some of its most radical members have left. A symbolic change was marked by the fact, that in 2015 an over 90 year old member, the leader of the Active Citizens Movement, who tore the Nazi flag from the Partenon in 1941, decided to leave. New party began to appear on the left side of the political spectrum: MeRa 25 of Y. Varoufakis or Greek Solution of K. Velopoulos. Nevertheless, Alexis Tsipras, Syriza's leader has strengthened its leadership in the party and dictated his political vision to its members, what led to the further institutionalization of Syriza.

Syriza came to power in the aftermath of a deep economic and institutional crisis. Its earlier anti-establishment stance and radical slogans could be seen as a threat to the Greek democracy, but being in government and respecting the state's earlier commitments to international financial institutions kept it from the realization of its radical ideas. Tsipras's government was functioning in the boundaries of the constitutional system. Its political agenda was characterized by defending the interests of Greece outside (reparation problems with the Germany) and at the same time continuing earlier goals, as increasing the social support, legalization of same-sex couples, the building of a mosque in Athens. Syriza's left populism did not hinder it from looking for support from the Greek orthodox Church.

The parliamentary elections from 7 July 2019 resulted in Syriza moving to opposition. It is still one of the main Greek parties and has the support of 30% of voters. Support for other parties does not exceed 10%. If next elections establish Syriza's position, it can replace PASOK as a base of Greek two party system.

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